

About
MUMMIES



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COVER:

A coffin containing the mummy
of Usermontu, a priest, 630 B.C.

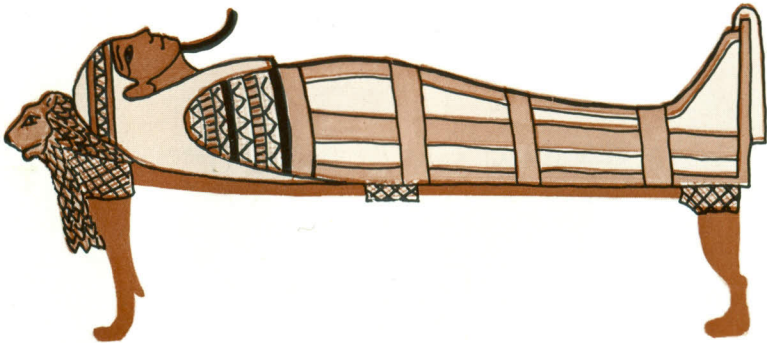




About Mummies

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Why Mummies?

Mummies are human or animal bodies that have been mummified, that is, preserved against otherwise natural disintegration. But there was a reason why this practice with humans was pursued, especially to such a degree of perfection as in ancient Egypt. The principal motivation for such embalming were religious concepts. The Egyptians embalmed the dead because they believed that the perfect soul would return to its body after death. The body, then, would once again be animated. Consequently, the Egyptians took great pains to preserve the body against any influences which might destroy it.

This idea of the necessity for preserving the body gradually evolved into a complex theology over the thousands of years of the Egyptian civilization. The Egyptians called the soul BA and his double KA. This double, or KA, has been interpreted in many ways as, for example, to mean the *self* or the *personality*. The Egyptians did not wish this relationship between BA and KA to be lost in the world beyond the grave. To avoid such a rupture it was thought necessary to keep the body as complete and perfect as possible. We can see, therefore, that the very first belief in *immortality* or life after death began with the Egyptians.

The word mummy is of Arabic origin. It means bitumen, or "bitumenized being." Bitumen is a mineral substance, as asphalt, that was used in the embalming process.

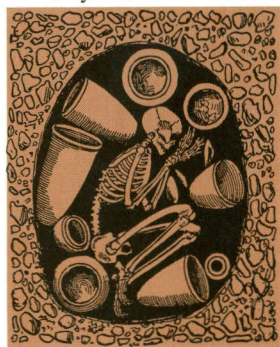
Early Burials

The earliest burials by the Egyptians are of the period called *predynastic*, that is, of a time before a chronological record of the kings of Egypt. Near the pyramid of Seneferu, a number of these predynastic burials have been found which date back thousands of years B.C. These earliest graves in the Nile Valley consisted of shallow hollows. They were dug in sandy and shingly ground just beyond the mud

deposits left from the annual inundation by the Nile River. The mud deposits which border the river stretch on each side toward the distant mountains.

These shallow graves were irregular in shape but mostly round. The oldest of these graves seem to suggest that the intention was to dispose of the body with the least trouble. In other words, there is not much evidence of any extensive preparation for the burial. The body was placed on the bare ground in this shallow pit or hollow.

There was nevertheless a certain simple uniform custom in the position given the body in the grave. It is found lying on its *left* side with the head usually turned toward the south. The knees are bent up so that they are on a level with the thorax, or top of the breast. The right arm is usually in front and the left arm is turned under the body and legs, the left hand under the knees. Various objects were placed about the body, principally vessels of rude shape and coarse earthenware. The vessels contained funeral offerings such as grain. In addition to the vessels some graves have such further objects as flint weapons, hand axes, and knives also of flint.



In some of the predynastic graves the bodies were found wrapped in skins of gazelles. The skins were fastened together by thongs. Other than this covering there was no further attempt to preserve the body. There was no resort at this early period to any form of mummification.

Notwithstanding the simplicity and rude form of these predynastic burials, they signify that in this remote period the Egyptian believed he would live again. If he had not thought so, he would not have left food in the grave for the deceased to use in the next world, as well as tools and weapons to protect himself.



Painting by Dr. H. Spencer Lewis depicting the Egyptian embalming methods.

Mummification

The process of mummification required knowledge of anatomy. It appears that the Egyptian at an early period did possess this knowledge for the mummification of human bodies. The Egyptian King Teta, who was second king of the first dynasty (c. 4366 B.C.), wrote quite an extensive book about anatomy. The record indicates, too, that he experimented with drugs for the preservation of the body. Mummification was introduced as a regular practice in the Third Dynasty (2980-2900 B.C.). The walls of later tombs and of certain pyramid chambers depict the process of mummification in illustrated form and are often accompanied by hieroglyphic inscriptions further describing the wall paintings. Papyrus scrolls, a material on which the Egyptians wrote, have preserved inscriptions of the mummifying method and the burial. Later Greek historians who visited Egypt were witnesses to the embalming, or were told about it by the Egyptian priests of the mystery schools and left accounts of what they learned. The accounts by these historians are, in general, similar though their visits to Egypt were at a time when mummification had already been in practice with some variation for centuries.

One of the most graphic accounts of mummification is that given by the Greek historian Herodotus (5th Century B.C.). We choose therefore to quote him in part.

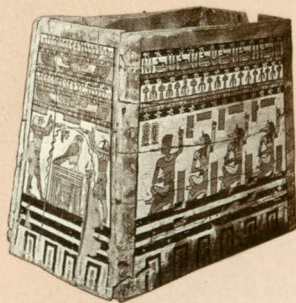
There are persons who are appointed for this purpose; they, when the dead body is brought to them, show to the bearers wooden models of corpses made exactly alike by painting. And they show that which they say is the most expensive manner of embalming, . . . they then show the second, which is inferior and less expensive; and then third, which is the cheapest.

First they draw out the brains through the nostrils with an iron hook, taking part out in this manner, the rest by infusion of drugs. Then with a sharp Ethiopian stone they make an incision in the side and take out the bowels; and having cleansed the abdomen and rinsed it with palm wine, they next sprinkled it with powdered perfumes. Then having filled the belly with pure myrrh pounded, and cassia, and other perfumes, frankincense excepted, they sew it up again. And when they have done this, they steep it in natrum, leaving it under for seventy days; . . . at the expiration of the seventy days they wash the corpse, and wrap the whole body in bandages of flaxen cloth, smearing it with gum, . . . after this the relatives, having taken the body back again, made a wooden case in the shape of man, and having made, they enclosed the body; and thus, having fastened it up, they stored it in a sepulchral chamber setting it upright against the wall.

There is, we are told by Herodotus, a second and less expensive way. This does not require making an incision or removing the bowels. A cedar oil is injected and the oil is prevented from escaping while the body is steeping in natrum. When the oil is eventually released it brings with it the intestines and vital organs. The natrum in which the body was steeped dissolves the flesh; nothing then remains but skin and bones.



"To embalm, swathe a mummy"



The very poor Egyptians could not afford elaborate forms of embalming. Many of these indigent people had burials not greatly unlike those of the predynasty period. However, a third method of embalming used for the poor consisted of just thoroughly rinsing the abdomen with another mineral substance and then steeping it for seventy days.

The four canopic jars containing intestines and a coffer in which jars were placed.

The bodies of the more expensive method of mummification were filled with resin and spices. The bandages used in wrapping the mummy varied in length and breadth and were flaxen (linen) material. They average from three feet by two and one-half inches to thirteen feet by four and one-half inches. As far back as Amenhotep IV (reigned c. 1375-1358 B.C.) it was customary to inscribe hieratic and hieroglyphic characters upon mummy cloths.

In the XXI Dynasty (1090-945 B.C.) a new method of treatment of the mummy began. It was the effort to make the mummy more lifelike in appearance. This consisted of "padding the cheeks and other parts of the body with clay pushed into place through incisions in the skin."

Amulets having a religious significance and believed to help the deceased in the other world were placed in the wrappings and sometimes embodied in the corpse. One of the x-rayed mummies in the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum shows an amulet of metallic substance in the pectoral area of the body.

There were four jars in which the principal intestines were placed. These have been named *canopic* by modern Egyptologists after Canopus, Egypt, about which place there is a legend. Each of the jars was dedicated to one of the four genii of the underworld. The cardinal points of

the compass were represented by these genii. The design of the cover of each jar was the shape of the head of the deity which it depicted. These were as follows: *Mestha* (man-headed), *Hapi* (dog-headed), *Tuamautef* (jackal-headed), *Quebhsennuf* (hawk-headed). The *Mestha* jar contained the stomach and large intestines; *Hapi*, the small intestines; *Tuamautef*, lungs and heart; *Quebhsennuf*, the liver and gall bladder. In the XVIII Dynasty these jars were beautifully made of alabaster, argonite, and fine calcareous stone (a number of these are on display in the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum).

A liquid plaster was run on the tops of the jars thus securely fastening them. A special coffer of wood and plaster ornamented with designs from the *Book of the Dead* was made to house the four canopic jars. There was a division in the coffer for each of the jars. The coffer, over which was placed a folded cover, was finally put on a sledge for transportation. It was considered essential that the intestines be protected, for without them the deceased could not hope to live again.

There was an evolution in the design of the canopic jars. In the *Old Kingdom* they had just plain lids; in the *Middle Kingdom* human heads were introduced which attempted to be personal portraits. In the *New Kingdom* the heads, as said, represented the four genii of the underworld.

Mummies of the Roman period were identified by small wooden labels. These were tied about the neck of the dead. They bore inscriptions naming the deceased, and a record was sometimes given of the father and mother. The manner of bandaging the mummies in the Roman period was very ornate. The bandages were wound around the corpse in such a manner as to form a geometrical pattern as of uniform squares. In the Ptolemaic (Greek) period, masks, called *cartonnages*, made of linen and plaster and painted or modeled as portraits of the deceased, were placed over the head part of the body.

The mummy of a royal person had a convex covering of wood made in the form of a mummy; on this were painted scenes and then it was varnished.



A rectangular coffin with eyes of Horus painted on the exterior.

Coffins—Sarcophagi

Coffins were usually made of wood. The wood most commonly used was cedar from the famous forests of Lebanon. One of the oldest examples was of Mycerinus (Menkure), King of the IV Dynasty (c. 3633 B.C.). In the XI and XII Dynasties the coffin was usually rectangular in form. It had a cover consisting of one flat plank. Large blue, red, white, green, and yellow stripes were painted on it, also lotus flowers and pictures of funeral offerings. Inside there were scenes from chapters of the *Book of the Dead*.

One or two *utâts*, that is, pictures representing the *Eyes of Horus* were painted on the inside and outside of the coffin. These were at the head and it was believed that by the aid of these eyes the deceased would look forth from the coffin "that he may behold the Lord of the Horizon (the sun) when he sails across the heavens."

In the New Kingdom the coffins became *mummiform*. They were normally of wood or molded linen and plaster in the shape of the mummy instead of being just a rectangular chest. The type of coffin used in the XIX Dynasty was very beautiful. It was decorated profusely inside with scenes of all kinds. Vignettes from the *Book of the Dead* included figures of the gods, amulets, and rows of emblematic designs all in bright colors.

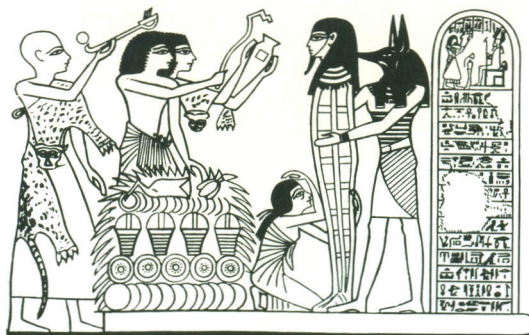
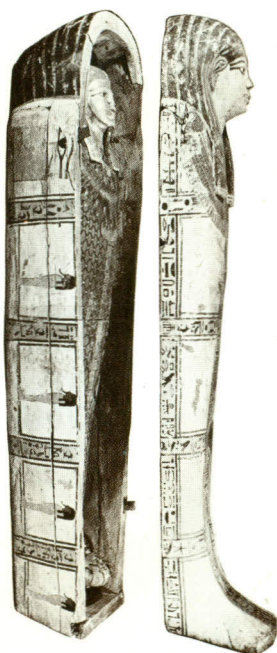
Faces on the coffins of the XXI to XXXVI Dynasties were flesh-colored and gilded. Eyes made of obsidian were inlaid with realistic appearance. These attached faces of the deceased were called *cartonnages* as previously explained. Coffins were often placed in larger ornamental ones. Some of these sarcophagi are of alabaster or basalt.

Funeral

The funerals of royalty and of the wealthy class in ancient Egypt were both solemn and impressive rites. The burial in most instances was on the western side of the Nile in the low but rugged cliffs fringing the desert. The mummy was borne in a solemn procession by wailing women and priests from the eastern shore to the necropolis in the west. The wailing women who beat their breasts and sprinkled ashes on their heads were not all relatives or friends of the deceased. Many were professional mourners who were paid for their performance.

When the tomb known as the “eternal house” had been reached, the coffin was then set up on end. It was turned so as to face the south. Prayers were offered before the mummy by various persons, and sacred rites performed. The principal purpose of the rites at the tomb was to bring about a restoration of all the bodily functions of the mummy so that it would be prepared for its long journey in the next world.

A mummiform coffin shaped to the contour of the mummy. ▶



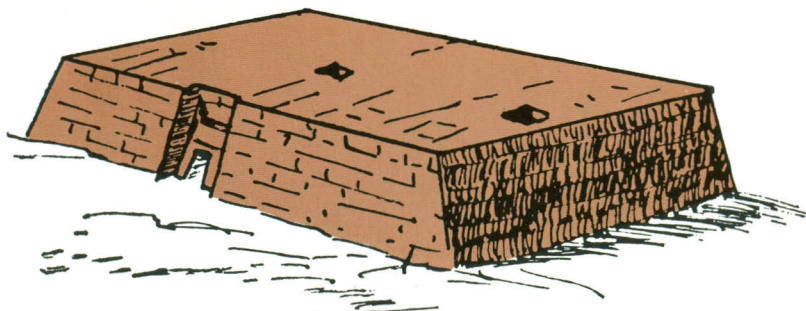
◀ Attendants with mummy at the tomb ceremony.

Tombs

One of the earliest types of Egyptian tombs is the *mastaba*. (The word is from the Arabic and means seat, because the shape of the tomb was similar to a later seat in use.) The finest example of a mastaba is at Sakkara. It is of a rectangular shape and a massive building. The four walls, or sides, are "all symmetrically inclined toward their common center." The faces of these walls are not flat or smooth because they most often consist of irregular courses of masonry.

The mastaba consists of three parts, a *chamber*, *serdab*, and *pit*. In the chamber is a stele, an inscribed stone, referring to the deceased and offering prayers. The chamber likewise may contain funeral offerings. The serdab is a niche in which is placed a statue of the deceased. Such a statue is an exact reproduction of the deceased's body. This was done so that the KA of the deceased (his personality or self, his double) may attach itself to it. The pit is the place into which the mummy in its coffin was lowered.

One of the earliest type
tombs, the Mastaba.

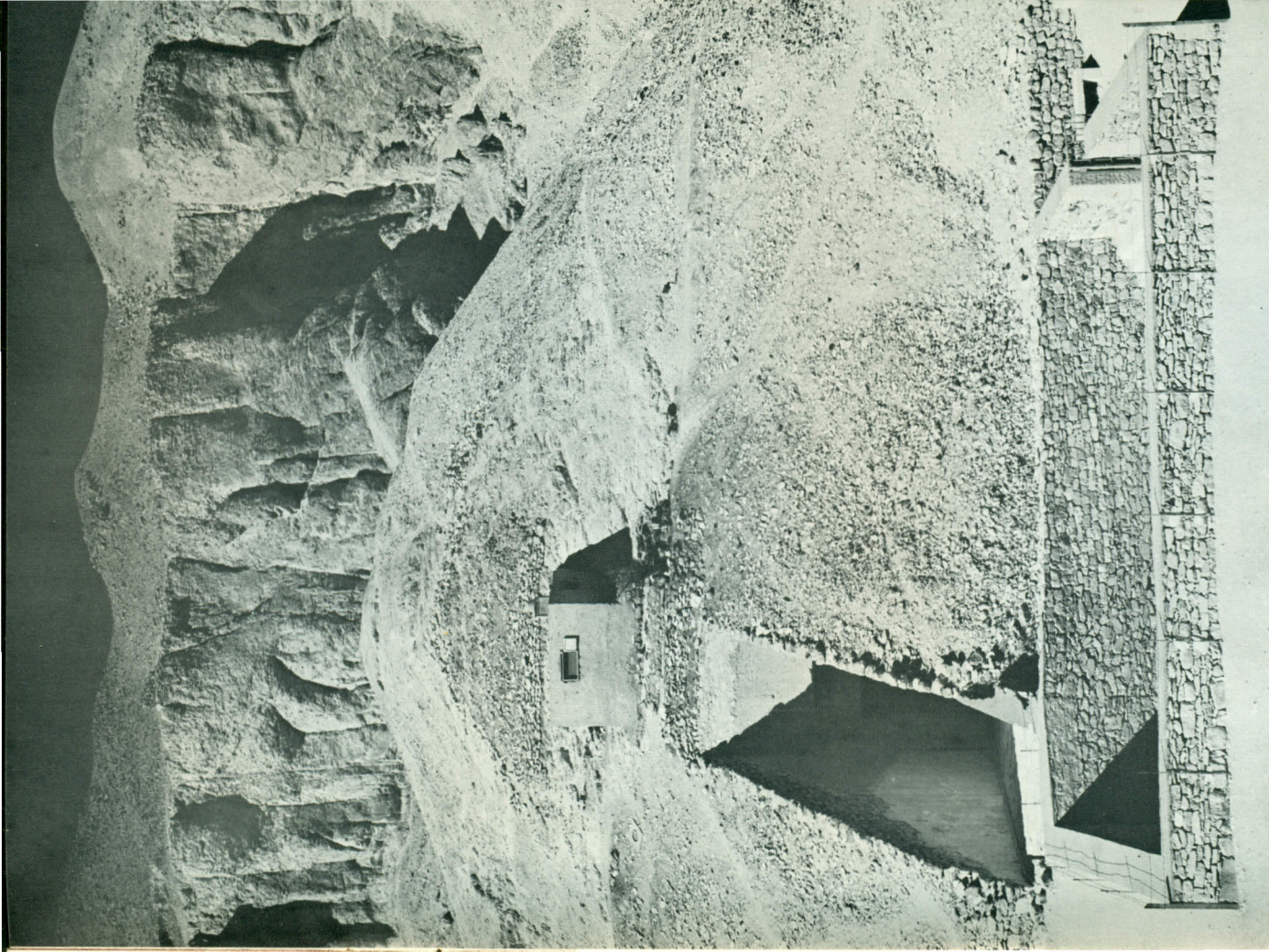


Later tombs were extensive projects. The royal tombs, like those in the Valley of the Kings in the western hills across from the ancient capital of Thebes, consist of large subterranean passageways leading to a series of chambers. The sepulchral chamber in which the mummy was placed was often skillfully secreted, in an attempt to thwart tomb robbers. The walls of the long corridor and chambers of the pharaonic tombs are beautifully painted with scenes from the *Book of the Dead* and often depict events in the life of the deceased.

The pyramids were designed by the pharaohs as their eternal home, and interior areas of most are beautifully painted with funeral scenes and those portraying expected events in the afterlife. The vanity of the pharaohs caused them to also extol pictorially their conquests and achievements. Placed in the tomb were many objects used by the pharaoh during his lifetime, such as furniture, jewelry, implements, and weapons. These he was expected to use in the next life. The collection of all such inscribed material found in the pyramids and constituting a great source of our knowledge of ancient Egypt has been called by Egyptologists the "Pyramid Texts."

The weighing of the heart on the Judgment Scales. The heart (symbol of the soul) is on the left tray. The feather (symbol of truth) is at the right being weighed against the heart. The jackal-headed god is Anubis.





Entrance to the tomb of famed King
Tutankhamen in Valley of the Kings.



The mummy chamber in the only full-sized reproduction of an Egyptian rock tomb. (Rosicrucian Museum).



Interior of tomb of King Tutankhamen.



◀ Road to the Valley of the Kings. Here is where the tombs of many of the great Pharaohs are. It is located on the West bank of the Nile across from the ancient city of Thebes.

BACK COVER

The mystical KA, the immortal self said to dwell in every man, is depicted here with arms upraised and a goddess standing on its head. This KA was distinguished from the soul. It is the first concept had of self or the inner awareness.

